



# USGBC Statement in Response to USA Today News Article

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Washington, DC - (Oct. 24, 2012) - The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) issued a statement in response to the *USA Today* piece that ran today about the organization and its LEED green building program.

USGBC is a 501c3 non-profit organization that is dedicated to sustainable building design and construction. Its mission is to transform the way buildings and communities are designed, built and operated, enabling an environmentally and socially responsible, healthy, and prosperous environment that improves the quality of life.

"The LEED program has been built from the ground up by hundreds of thousands of volunteers and is the catalyst for fundamentally changing the way we think about designing, constructing and operating buildings in the United States and across the globe," said Rick Fedrizzi, founding chair of the U.S. Green Building Council and the organization's current President and CEO. "Green buildings save energy, water and precious resources, reduce waste and carbon emissions, create jobs, save money, drive innovation and provide healthier, more comfortable spaces to live, work and learn."

The LEED green building program has spurred explosive growth in energy-efficient buildings, which has supported almost eight million jobs across all 50 states and contributes \$554 billion to the U.S. economy annually. Today, more than 9 billion square feet of building space is participating in LEED. While LEED has propelled transformation in the building market, it cannot be stagnant and must be constantly updated. The LEED program was built in a way that ensures it undergoes a rigorous cycle of continuous improvement and evolution. USGBC is currently in this process now and taking the next big step forward with the next version of LEED.

"LEED is not and never will be a tool for mandatory regulation; it is a voluntary, market-based green building program. Many of the green building strategies the *USA Today* article is critical of are the very things that have brought thousands of large commercial real estate builders, owners, and operators into the green building discussion, resulting in millions saved and thousands of better buildings across the world. The costs of individual LEED credits are irrelevant because the market learns to deliver green buildings at little to no added cost," added Fedrizzi.

LEED isn't perfect, but it is always improving. The program is developed by technical committees of the highest caliber and any changes to LEED are commented on by the public and must be approved through a democratic ballot process open to all USGBC members.

USGBC is proud that these measures that were once deemed exceptional are now industry standard," concluded Fedrizzi, "That is why we keep raising the bar. We may be the only organization that has created a program that when the market really starts to like it, we make it more challenging. We develop LEED using a consensus-driven process, and while the rate of change may not be fast enough for some who would like to see more requirements that process allows us to work with the building industry to find the sweet spot that ultimately becomes the LEED rating system. We think we will have more success with the industry's help than without it."

USGBC is currently in development of LEED v4, the fourth version of LEED, which is currently in fifth public comment. To view the drafts of LEED v4 visit [www.usgbc.org/leedv4](http://www.usgbc.org/leedv4).

## **U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)**

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is committed to a prosperous and sustainable future through cost-efficient and energy-saving green buildings.

USGBC works toward its mission of market transformation through its LEED green building program, robust educational offerings, a nationwide network of chapters and affiliates, the annual Greenbuild International Conference & Expo, and advocacy in support of public policy that encourages and enables green buildings and communities. For more information, visit [usgbc.org](http://usgbc.org) and connect on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

### LEED Green Building Program

LEED is the foremost program for the design, construction, maintenance and operations of green buildings. More than 49,000 projects are currently participating in the commercial and institutional LEED rating systems, comprising 9.1 billion square feet of construction space in all 50 states and 130 countries. In addition, more than 24,000 residential units have been certified under the LEED for Homes rating system, with more than 87,000 more homes registered.

By using less energy, LEED-certified spaces save money for families, businesses and taxpayers; reduce carbon emissions; and contribute to a healthier environment for residents, workers and the larger community. Learn more at [usgbc.org](http://usgbc.org).

15 comments

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#### Terry Hudgins

Ernst & Young LLP

2 years 12 weeks ago

Having participated in the LEED process since 1998 and my introduction to the pilot program for LEED v1 with the encouragement of Bob Berkebile, Jason McLennan and Kath Williams, I recall the mess that existed at the time. Developers and builders of homes, buildings and communities were declaring themselves and their projects as "green" or sustainable, because there was no benchmark, no standard, no baseline from which to compare. So, the article in the USA Today began their LEED piece in the middle of the story-- not at the beginning, and certainly not the end. In the beginning, there were shameful projects that were positioning themselves as green/sustainable projects that could not have been further from the characterization. The USA Today perspective is one that occurs from picking up a book and opening it in the middle--the perspective and context of the story is lost. The authors frustration aside, and for that matter our own (3-ring binders to on-line templates), the LEED road has not been perfect or portrayed as such --since it was created by imperfect people. It is a tool, amongst many, that can and should be leveraged to improve our constructed environment ,which continues to evolve and progress with technology, materials and talented people, who know more today than when we started!



#### Ramesh Gulatee

2 years 12 weeks ago

LEED is fundamentally flawed because it is a weighted system established by industry interests. It awards points to compliance with a set of criteria tha it alone has set, yet it does not take points away when the basics of good design practice are absent, i.e., an all glass building goes against good design practice and is atleast 50% wrong. I do not subscribe to the system that has the built in industry bias.



#### Bob Berkebile

BNIM Architects

2 years 12 weeks ago

- USA Today Story on LEED was Frank but Misleading -

After an hour with Tom Frank I knew that his Special Report in USA Today last week would probably not be consistent with my view of the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED rating system and its impact on the performance of buildings and developments in North America and worldwide. What I didn't know was that even though we didn't discuss it, he would argue many of the points I had argued early in the creation of the LEED system: it doesn't do enough to require energy efficiency and high performance design, and it's possible to game the system. He also seems concerned that LEED was created by people within the industry who stand to benefit from the use of the system.

I lost the argument that architects, scientists and environmentalists should create a more comprehensive, high performance system--for good reason. The genius of the LEED system is that it was created by a diverse group of volunteers from all sectors of the industry and that it was adopted by consensus. The goal was not perfection but transformation of an industry that has historically been reluctant to change. Transformation is taking place precisely because it was created by consensus among diverse industry stakeholders/users and because it was designed to be achievable.

The LEED system was designed to educate and to evolve, which it has done and will continue to do. (Version 4 is now in review.) I was struck by the fact that Mr. Frank raised some valid points but rather than clarify and contribute to the industry discourse, he chose to focus on a few failures among the earliest LEED tools and projects; he refused to recognize the positive evolution in the current portfolio of tools and systems or the impressive changes in building performance across the aggregate of all buildings certified to date. The article also makes much of the fact that LEED ignores the reality that buildings rarely perform as designed, but it fails to mention that LEED's requirement for commissioning was a significant leap in the direction of closing that gap by requiring verification of performance prior to certification.

The Living Building Challenge, created by USGBC volunteers and managed by the Cascadia Chapter of USGBC, was conspicuous by its absence from this report. The Living Building Challenge grew out of the LEED system, and it attempts to

push the industry into that next level of design, performance and environmental responsibility; Living Building certification requires a rigorous set of design criteria followed by a third party audit of a full year of building operation to prove that performance goals are met.

REGEN, another emerging tool currently in development by the USGBC and a core group of contributors, is being designed to shift the focus of community, development and building from merely sustainable to “regenerative,” meaning that its goal is to improve the vitality of the natural systems that support our wellbeing by the co-evolution of the whole system.

In simplified terms, many say that LEED is focused on “doing less harm,” the Living Building Challenge focuses on “doing no harm,” and REGEN’s emphasis is on “doing good” and yielding positive, regenerative, whole system improvements.

Many of the materials, products, systems and services that were in use when USGBC was formed have been rendered obsolete by USGBC and LEED. The result is that thousands of buildings and developments are more efficient, healthier for the occupants and the environment, and they cost less to operate. Smart businesses, institutions and governments are using LEED with remarkable results, and often their employees are the volunteer members of USGBC who continue the evolution of this transformative portfolio of tools.

USGBC and thousands of volunteers are to be congratulated. They have created tools that are being used or replicated on every continent, proving what very few thought was possible--that significant, positive industry-wide changes can be accomplished in just two decades. This success makes it possible to imagine transforming our thinking and our culture by raising our goals to increase human capacity and the vitality and resilience of all life. The tools to accomplish this will need to be open source, more comprehensive, elegant and economical than the current LEED tools. This conversation is already underway but limited to a small leadership group at this point. Is it possible that USA Today has launched a national dialogue of discovery with this report and accelerated the future we, and our children want?



**Jason Dunlop**  
Vice President, Big D Construction Corp

2 years 13 weeks ago

Take a look at Brendan Owen's article as well:

<http://www.usgbc.org/articles/fact-check-usgbc-brendan-owens-usa-today>



**Michele Skupic**  
Fidelity National Financial, Inc.

2 years 13 weeks ago

One of my favorite quotes is by Albert Einstein: "Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds" .

Like Einstein, anyone in the green space is an inventor or an innovator. Everyone in this emerging space is breaking new ground every day. But when you break new ground it is a process of give and take to find the best solutions. Not saying there are not legitimate challenges in the USA Today article, but LEED standards were never intended to be a "one size fits all" . The free market drives the demand, and the success of the USGBC's efforts is directly reflected by the growth of LEED Certified properties. Further it has created the path for new standards for green development, environmentally sound building practices, and energy performance standards that have resulted in significant energy and cost savings in the built environment worldwide. "What's in it for me" has always been the measure of success. Until it benefits "them", they don't see it. As advocates of energy independence and a healthier built environment for today and future generations, we must keep the vision but build the story with real time facts and data. We need to make the "what's in it for me" is crystal clear. The green math is still fuzzy and the industry knows it. Let's all work together to find clarity to support our collective vision.



**Douglas Gordon**

2 years 13 weeks ago

As always, Nadav Malin offers my favorite well-considered outlook. I especially appreciate his mentioning Standard 189 and the IgCC as well as the fact that many jurisdictions have jumped onto the USGBC LEED bandwagon without really understanding it. That, from my understanding, is why USGBC, ASHRAE, AIA, and other supporters of the fledgling ICC code are trying to control the very apples and oranges (i.e., certifications as jurisdictional incentives/requirements) phenomenon on which USA Today is reporting. My rather inane analogy for the certification/standards/codes continuum is that it is like a slug. USGBC is the antennae element moving into unknowable territory, the standards organizations test and confirm the ground, and the codes finally drag along forward as the standard of care. To many it looks painfully slow, but it does move forward.



**Bruce Maine**  
HDR, Inc.

2 years 13 weeks ago

It's almost like the article was written by a climate change denier. Preferring to focus in on things like "bike racks" while missing the overall environmental and financial benefits of LEED.



**Clara Simon**  
Sustainability Manager, University of Washington

2 years 13 weeks ago

The University of Washington is recognized as one of the nation's greenest universities and is committed to sustainability. LEED certified projects is one way that the UW measures sustainability success in the built environment. Using best management practices as a baseline, LEED is an overlay that creates common language and approaches in planning and documenting a project's sustainability actions, and is a recognized standard of success by the State of Washington and



**Barry Giles**

Founder & CEO, BuildingWise, LLC

Pro Reviewer

2 years 13 weeks ago

"The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about"...said Oscar Wilde. Right now we have reached the 'main stream' where we are being talked about, critiqued, protested and generally being given a 'good shake', and really, that's OK. We've all know for some time that the data showing that buildings actually do reduce impacts has been missing from the equation...well, let's change that, just as we have been making changes to LEED over the last 10 years and more. We have to have a solution (LEED) that delivers and it's right there...it's called LEED EB!



**Nadav Malin**

President, BuildingGreen, Inc.

2 years 13 weeks ago

Look like I was a little too quick to complain, in my long critique, about how Frank didn't make use of my interview. There is a second part to the story, at least part of which is now posted online, that talks at length about LEED v4 and includes some comments from me. This second part of the story seems much more reasonable: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/10/24/leed-update-green-building-revision/1650519/>

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